

# INTERSECTING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, 1450-1700

## Trade, Conquest, Missions, Enslavement

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Rome, 30-31 January 2025

Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

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Dipartimento di Studi Europei, Americani e Interculturali, Sapienza Università di Roma

## PROGRAMME

EDITED BY

ANGELO CATTANEO, SIMONE CELANI, GIULIA MAGGIORE



PROGETTI DI RICERCA DI RILEVANTE INTERESSE NAZIONALE (PRIN 2022) - REF.: 20222SY2K7

"MAPPING AND TRANSLATING SPACES, CULTURES AND LANGUAGES.

EXPERIENCES FROM THE MISSIONS CONNECTED TO THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE (1540-1700)"

## SYNOPSIS

The symposium "Intersecting Sub-Saharan Africa, 1450-1700. Trade, Conquests, Missions, Enslavement" is organised in the context of the PRIN 2022 Project "Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures, and Languages. Experiences from the Missions Connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700) - [MAT]. The MAT Project has three main objectives:

a. Drawing up a comprehensive analytical catalogue of overlooked, dispersed metalinguistic and multilingual sources - reports, letters, Christian doctrines, word lists, lexicons, grammars, and maps that describe linguistic practices and/or display bilingual or three-lingual evidence - produced mostly in missionary contexts.

b. Studying the emergence of multilingual communities in early modernity involving cultures and languages that were previously unknown in Europe.

c. Within this broad "horizontal" survey, highlighting two case studies to carry out an in-depth "vertical" comparative analysis of cultural-linguistic contacts and translations in Sub-Saharan Africa and China, specifically chosen because they are two paradigmatic, coeval cases detailing the different shades of cultural translations in colonial and missionary contexts.

"Intersecting Sub-Saharan Africa, 1450-1700" is an endeavour to direct attention to some of the heterogeneous contexts of Africa at the time of the arrival of Portuguese merchants and Catholic missionaries on the Western and Eastern shores of Sub-Saharan Africa. This research trajectory is developed within the broad horizon of connected, or at least synchronic, history with the kingdoms of Western Sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic and Ottoman Africa, Ethiopia, and Southeast Africa. The symposium is structured into seven consecutive sessions: Missionary Perspectives; Parallel Islamic Networks Across Africa; Ethiopia; Mapping, Translating and Classifying Africa in a Global Context; Perspectives on Enslavement; Visual and Material Interactions and Exchanges; and finally Linguistic Interactions and Exchanges. The interactions between European powers, Catholic religious orders, and African kingdoms intertwined political, economic, and religious interests, turning Africa-Europe relations into a complex arena of dominance and exchange that also impacted the world on a global scale.

We have chosen as the icon of the symposium an ivory pendant mask, currently held at the MET in New York, created in the early sixteenth century in Benin, which is believed to have been produced for the King of Benin, Oba Esigie (1504-1550), to honour his mother, Idia. According to the curators of the MET, it is an idealised portrait. The diadem and openwork collar are adorned with stylised depictions of mudfish and bearded faces of Portuguese men. Due to their connection with the sea, mudfish symbolise the king's dual human and divine

nature, while the Portuguese were associated with the spirit realm that brought wealth and power to the Oba. Ivory, a key export and symbol of purity linked to the god Olokun, the spiritual counterpart of the Oba, underlines the trade links between the kingdom of Benin and the Portuguese merchants. The mask embodies some of the central themes of our symposium: the plurality of relationships, interactions and exchanges between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe in the period between 1450 and 1700. The symbolic richness of the mask reflects the central role of art and material culture in the construction of identity, authority, and cross-cultural ties.

Intersecting Africa is a multidisciplinary symposium that convenes archivists, linguists, historians of art, missions, Islamic Africa, Ottoman Africa, Western Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia, and Southeast Africa. The initiative focuses on a number of macro-themes that intercept the history of Africa from plural and complementary perspectives between 1450 and 1700. These themes include the history of missionary presence and missionary geographies, both before and after the establishment and intervention of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, as well as the first linguistic interactions documented by grammars and lexicons of African languages in European languages. A second key theme concerns the pervasive and disruptive role of slavery and reflection on enslavement, both to justify and counter it, at the interface of missionary action and presence. Additionally, we will examine the history of material and visual cultures developed in some Christian \ missionary contexts in Africa and their reception, including misinterpretations and re-contextualisation, in European archives and collections. Furthermore, we will analyse early representations of Africa and Africans addressed to Japanese and Chinese missionary contexts, within the global framework of Jesuit knowledge networks.

Seemingly antinomian and yet synchronous phenomena, such as the impact of trans-continental trade and multiple religious networks; the rescaling of the enslaving processes of Black Africans to a global scale, brought forward by Europeans, primarily Portuguese merchants, followed later by other European powers; the emergence of colonial categorization and hierarchical classifications; the production and circulation of knowledge, mediation and translations; the resilience of local African traditions to the imposition of European paradigms, in which African cultures reinterpreted and negotiated external influences: these are some of the main dynamics emerging from the joint contributions of the several scholars participating in the symposium “Intersecting Sub-Saharan Africa, 1450-1700. Trade, Conquests, Missions, Enslavement.”

# INTERSECTING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, 1450-1700

## Trade, Conquest, Missions, Enslavement

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Rome, 30-31 January 2025

### PROGRAMME

**Thursday, 30 January 2025 - Sapienza Università di Roma - Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia - Aula Partenone**

#### **9:30 - Welcome Greetings and Introduction**

Arianna Punzi (Presidente della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Sapienza Università di Roma)

Paola Avallone (Direttrice dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR)

Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR), Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma), *Introduction*

#### **10:00 - Session 1 - MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVES**

Chair: Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Barbara Turchetta (Università di Bergamo), *Mapping the Understanding of the Unknown. Places, Languages and Cultures in the European Discovery of the African Continent*

Flavio Belluomini, (Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide), Giulia Maggiore (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR) *Propaganda Fide and the Congo Mission at the Time of Urban VIII*

Patrizia Morelli (Archivio Generale e Biblioteca Centrale Ordine Frati Minori Cappuccini), *Capuchin Missionaries in Sub-Saharan West Africa: Bridging Faith and Cultures (17th-18th Century)*

**11:30 - Coffee break**

## 12:00 - Session 2 - PARALLEL ISLAMIC NETWORKS ACROSS AFRICA

Chair: Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner (CSIC - Incipit, Santiago de Compostela)

Francesco Zappa (Sapienza Università di Roma), *A Parallel (and Partly Overlapping) Contact Zone: "Islamic Languages" in Africa and Beyond*

Nicola Melis (Università di Cagliari), *Tripoli as an Ottoman Gateway to Trans-Saharan Networks (1500–1700)*

## 13:00 - Lunch break

## 14:30 - Session 3 - ETHIOPIA

Chair: Sabina Pavone (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale)

Matteo Salvatore (American University of Sharjah), *The Production and Circulation of Ethiopianist Knowledge in Early Modern Europe, 1400s-1650s*

Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner (CSIC - Incipit, Santiago de Compostela), *Hermeneutics for Ethiopia. A Laboratory of Texts in the Service of the Jesuit Proselytising Project*

Guia Boni (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale), *Damião de Góis: a Portuguese Humanist at the Courts of Europe*

## 16:00 - Coffee break

## 16:30 - Session 4 - MAPPING, TRANSLATING, AND CLASSIFYING AFRICA IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Chair: Matteo Salvatore (American University of Sharjah)

Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR), *Placing and Classifying Africa for a Japanese Audience: The De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam (Macao 1590) and the Contempt for Africa and Blackness*

Paolo De Troia (Sapienza Università di Roma), *"The Lord of Heaven gives to man without limit": Africa in 17th-Century Sino-Jesuit Atlases*



Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma), *"His slave, our slave, your slave, their slaves": The Place of Africa in Missionary Grammars*

## Friday, 31 January 2025 - Sapienza Università di Roma - Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia - Aula Partenone

### 9:30 - Session 5 - PERSPECTIVES ON ENSLAVEMENT

Chair: Cécile Fromont (Harvard University)

Festo Mkenda SJ (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu), *Moulding a Language for Slavery: The Preponderance of Slaves and Enslaving Practices in António Gomes' 1648 'Viagem ao Império de Monomotapa'*

José Lingna Nafafé (University of Bristol), *Legal and Religious Languages of the Portuguese Slave Trade Challenged in Favour of Universal Freedom: the Case of Lourenço da Silva Mendonça*

Luis Martínez Ferrer (Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Roma), *Emanuele Ne Vunda, Known as the "Negrita," and His Embassy to Rome from the Congo (1604-1608)*

Glória de Santana Paula (Centre for History of the University of Lisbon, CH-ULisboa), *"Cafraria": The Construction of a Geographical and Anthropological Category*

### 11:30 - Coffee break

### 12:00 - Session 6 - VISUAL AND MATERIAL INTERACTIONS AND EXCHANGES

Chair: Angelo Cattaneo (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea/CNR)

Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University, Lüneburg - Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz), *Matters of Scale. Afro-Eurasian Connectivity in Coastal East Africa*

Cécile Fromont (Harvard University), *Idol? Image? Fetish? Naming Spiritually Empowered Things of the Early Modern Central African*

Deborah Dainese (Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia, Norwich), *Tiotioro? Material Translation and Transcultural Entanglements in the Modern Era: A Case Study from the Ethnographic Collections of the Ethnological Museum "Anima Mundi" (Vatican Museums)*

Gaia Delpino, Rosa Anna Di Lella (Museo delle Civiltà, Roma), *Translated Objects, Narrated Objects. African Collections of the Museum of Civilizations between Representations, Misunderstandings and Silences*

**14:00 - Lunch break**

**15:30 - Session 7 - LINGUISTIC INTERACTIONS AND EXCHANGES**

Chair: Barbara Turchetta (Università di Bergamo); Simone Celani (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Mariagrazia Russo (Università degli Studi Internazionali di Roma), *Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo (1621-1678) and His Testimony as a Missionary in Africa*

Gonçalo Fernandes (University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Vila Real), *Pioneering Linguistic Descriptions of Bantu Languages in 17th-Century Angola and Kongo*

Dominique Tougbo Koffi (Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan), *Legacy of the Slave Trade in the Endogenous Linguistic Universe of Côte d'Ivoire*

**17:00 - Coffee break**

Béatrice Akissi Boutin (Sapienza Università di Roma), *Societies and Linguistic Exchanges between Europeans and Africans on the West Coast of the Gulf of Guinea (15th-18th c.). New Evidences*

Nicolas Quint (CNRS/ EPHE/ INALCO, Parigi), *Capeverdean Creole: An Overview of the Conditions of Emergence of an Afro-Portuguese Language Born from Linguistic and Intercultural Contact*

**18:00 - Final remarks**

## ADDRESS AND CONTACTS

The conference is held in Rome on 30 and 31 January 2025, at Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula Partenone. Piazzale Aldo Moro, 5 - 00185 Roma.

The *Programme* and the *Book of Abstracts* are available online at:

<https://zenodo.org/records/14655808>

<https://sites.google.com/uniroma1.it/mapping-translating-prin22-cnr/workshop-2025>

The conference is conceived, organised, and hosted by the **PRIN 2022 Project “Mapping and Translating Spaces, Cultures and Languages: Experiences from the Missions connected to the Portuguese Empire (1540-1700)” - ref. 20222SY2K7:**

<https://sites.google.com/uniroma1.it/mapping-translating-prin22-cnr/home>

There are no registration and participation fees. The official language of the conference is English.

Scan the QR code for the route from the entrance of Sapienza (Piazzale Aldo Moro, 5) to the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia.



### **30-31 January 2025**

Sapienza Università di Roma  
Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia  
Aula Partenone  
P.le Aldo Moro, 5  
00185 Rome

For enquiries, please contact Angelo Cattaneo and Simone Celani at:

[angelomaria.cattaneo@cnr.it](mailto:angelomaria.cattaneo@cnr.it) - [simone.celani@uniroma1.it](mailto:simone.celani@uniroma1.it)



## Intersecting Sub-Saharan Africa, 1450-1700 Trade, Conquest, Missions, Enslavement

### Concept and scientific organisation

Angelo Cattaneo, Simone Celani, Giulia Maggiore

### Scientific Committee

Angelo Cattaneo, Simone Celani, Béatrice Akissi Boutin, Paolo De Troia, Cécile Fromont, Michela Graziosi, Giulia Maggiore, Sabina Pavone, Carlo Pelliccia, Flavio Rurale

### Organising Committee

Michela Graziosi, Giulia Maggiore

### Data Media Management

Francesca Di Donato, Lottie Provost

### Administrative Secretariat

Chiara Bigiotti, Alessandra Lisci, Rosi Cotza

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L'Orientale), JeMiNA – Jesuit Missions  
in Northern Abyssinia (1557-1632):  
A Comprehensive Approach**

